DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 881 FL 009 288

AUTHOR Wright, James R.
TITLE Linguistic Theory Applied to the Teaching of "Standard English" to Speakers of Other Dialects.
PUB DATE Oct 76
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (October 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Applied Linguistics; Black Dialects; *Contrastive Linguistics; Interference (Language Learning); *Language Instruction; Language Variation; *Linguistic Theory; *Nonstandard Dialects; *Phonology; Pragmatics; Regional Dialects; Second Language Learning; Social Dialects; Sociolinguistics; *Standard Spoken Usage; Teaching Methods; *Transfer of Training

ABSTRACT

The linguistic theory of contrastive analysis, which provides pragmatic insights into the teaching of foreign languages, can be equally successful when applied to the teaching of one dialect of a language to speakers of its other dialects. This paper briefly illustrates how a theoretically constructed hierarchy of difficulty, originally designed for the systematic sequencing of teaching materials covering major problem areas confronting the speaker of English attempting to master the linguistic system of Spanish, may be adapted to the teaching of standard English to speakers of other English dialects. After a short explanation of the nature and structure of the hierarchy of difficulty, which is based upon the concept of learning transfer, a specific phonological example is presented for each of the various types of transfer. The paper concludes by briefly mentioning additional relevant considerations which serve to further adjust the theoretical hierarchy in order to achieve maximum practicality. (Author/AM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED150881

Linguistic Theory Applied to the Teaching of 'Standard English' to Speakers of Other Dialects

James R. Wright

For over forty years, American linguists have been hard at work investigating and precisely defining the linguistic features which are concomitant with different social strata. The goal of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada has been to collect and systematically present the linguistic correlates of social, historical and geographic factors. In the beginning, this was done largely for the sake of satisfying intellectual curiosity. Since the onset of urban problems and violence in the late sixties, linguists have increasingly sharpened their focus upon sociolinguistic topics. Recent significant linguistic research in the urban areas of major northern cities of the United States has provided educators with specific formally identifiable distinctive features of ghetto and other dialects.

The theory of Contrastive Analysis, which has been developed and refined by both theoretical and applied linguists, provides many pragmatic insights into the successful teaching of foreign languages. This systematic contrasting of different linguistic systems on a point-by-point basis can be equally successful when applied to dialects of the same language. What follows here is an illustration of how sequencing the teaching of different problem areas involving two different language systems in conflict can be adapted to the systematic handling of different dialects of the same language. The domain of the present illustration will be mainly confined to the phonological level. The Target Dialect, henceforth TD, will be the elusive mythical monster referred to glibly by many as 'Standard

FL009288

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James R. Wright

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

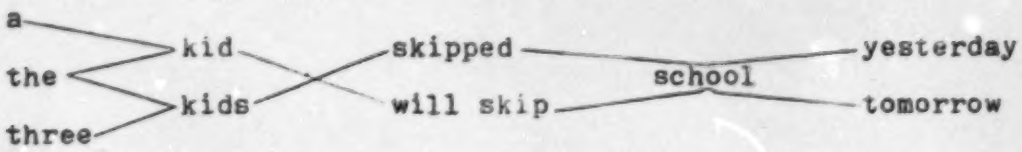
English', whereas the native speaker's first dialect, henceforth D1, will be a hypothetical composite of various features present in several dialects of so-called 'Black English'.[1]

The Contrastive Structure Series, edited by Charles Ferguson, ex-director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, deals with the problems of resolving the structural interferences between a speaker's native language and an additional one which he happens to be studying. Originally planned for the study of French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, by the English-speaking learner, the approach throughout is to capitalize upon the observable causes and effects of psycholinguistic transfer which emerge through the process of systematic contrastive study.

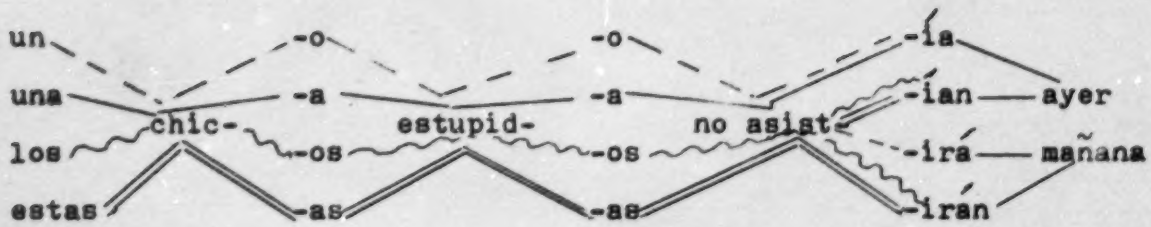
The concept of transfer is borrowed from learning theory developed by psycholinguists. Situations of negative transfer arise when situations occur in which appropriate linguistic responses in the speaker's native language system are in opposition to those in the target language system. Positive transfer, on the other hand, is not a source of such difficulty, since in this situation responses appropriate within the internalized native linguistic system directly correlate with corresponding ones in the target system. A third type of transfer, zero transfer, refers to situations in which appropriate responses in the native system have no matching counterparts in the target system.

A fundamental design feature in human language is the feature of choice. Language might be compared to a network of one-way streets

containing a series of forks. When traveling along such a route, whenever one arrives at a fork, he must make a decision as to which path to choose in order to continue moving ahead. Once this choice has been made and he proceeds along the new route, he cuts himself off from the routes which he did not select. As he continues further, each time he arrives at a new fork this decision-making process is repeated, each subsequent decision determining and restricting the range of future possibilities and consequences. To illustrate,



Here, cooccurrence relationships exist between 'a' and Noun Singular, between 'three' and Noun Plural, between 'yesterday' and Past Tense, and between 'tomorrow' and Future Tense. Moving from left to right, the choice of the determiner 'a', 'the', or 'three' is optional. Noun Singular following 'a' is an obligatory choice, as is Noun Plural after 'three, the choice of either Noun Singular or Noun Plural after 'the' being open. The choice of the conjunction 'and' between the noun subject and the verb in the above illustration is ∅ (i.e., null, zero, nonexistent). Of course, in the mind of the speaker, initially the choice is not that of the determiner, but rather the number of the noun subject which triggers the surface determiner which precedes it, as well as the subject-verb agreement marker which follows it as a verb suffix. The choice of the tense marker, also a verb suffix, will restrict the available choices of the subsequent time markers, 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow', etc.



By contrasting the sample Spanish sentence above with the English one on Page 3, it becomes apparent that the sets of choices are different in the two language systems. In Spanish, not only are nouns and determiners marked for number (singular or plural), but also for grammatical gender (male or female), as are <u>some</u> English nouns and pronouns. In Spanish, unlike in contemporary English, adjectives are marked for both gender and number. Subject-verb agreement exists in both systems, but where Spanish has six distinct person markers for its verb tenses, English has but two for its present tense (third person singular -s, ∅ elsewhere) and a single one for all forms of the simple past (-ed). Thus, predictably, it would be easier for a Spanish speaker to master this aspect of the English verbal system than it would be in the reverse situation. If we contrast these two illustrations above, we note differences at various points. A three-way English choice is in conflict with a four-way Spanish one, whereas the following choice is an obligatory one for both languages, i.e., number for English, number AND gender for Spanish.

When comparing the individual sets of choices involved in the structural system of one language with those available at the <u>same</u> points in the corresponding structure in the system of the other, a total theoretical possible set of nine combinations of optional, obligatory, or zero choices exists.

D1		TD
Obl.		Obl.
Obl.		Opt.
Obl.		∅
Opt.		Obl.
Opt.		Opt.
Opt.		∅
∅		Obl.
∅		Opt.
∅	← (Hypothetical Only) →	∅

Stockwell, Bowen and Martin, in their contribution to the Contrastive Structure Series, The Sounds of English and Spanish and The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish, arranged the first eight of these combinations into a theoretically-sound hierarchy of difficulty. The hierarchy, reading from top to bottom, represents greatest to least amounts of transfer-based difficulties, when the speaker of 'Standard English' attempts to master the target system of 'Standard Spanish'.[2]

Having successfully employed this hierarchical arrangement to sequence teaching materials in order to teach adult English-speaking monolingual teachers working with Mexican-American students, I can testify as to its efficacy in aiding them to grasp the morphophonological and syntactic/semantic concepts of their own and their students' languages. This very practical success suggested and implied equally favorable results if the use of such a hierarchy were adapted and applied to two dialects of the same language. These dialects, of course, are the 'Standard English' and 'Black English' composite mentioned at the top of Page 2, above. Employing the same arrangement used by Stockwell and Bowen, the following hierarchy is based upon moving from D1 ('Standard English') to TD ("Black English'). The

more difficult the type of learning transfaer involved, the higher that type appears in the transfer. Hence, items of Difficulty Order 1, being the most troublesome, should be introduced to the learner early, and continuously reinforced as decreasingly difficult concepts are added. Theoretically, such a sequencing cannot fail, as only through repetition and practice does the difficult become easier. The list of examples in the hierarchy immediately below serves as an index for the illustrated discussion which follows it.

Magnitude	Difficulty Order	Comparison D1	Comparison TD	Examples (Discussion Follows)
	1	∅	Obl	D1 Consonant Cluster Reductions
I	2	∅	Opt	D1 Unstressed Initial Vowels
	3	Opt	Obl	D1/TD Different Allophonic Distribution
	4	Obl	Opt	D1 Pre-Nasal Front Vowels
II	5	Obl	∅	D1 [243#] Pitch Pattern Extinction
	6	Opt	∅	D1 Nasalized Vowel Extinction
	7	Opt	Opt	D1/TD Different Syllable-Initial Consonant Clusters
III	8	Obl	Obl	D1/TD Areas of No Significant Differences

Order 1. D1 Consonant Cluster Reductions. (D1=∅, TD=Obl). This combination involves the most difficult of all eight possibilities. A feature which does not exist at all in D1 has an obligatory counterpart in TD. Non-language-learning speakers of TD (ranging from small children who have mastered the system in infancy to those who have acquired this proficiency later) perform obligatory choice operations automatically, and in many instances are totally unaware of the features in their underlying language system which govern their choices. The ∅ choice listed for D1 represents the fact that speakers of this dialect never use a given feature. The situation

<u>D1=ø, TD=Obl</u> exists in the case of certain word-final consonant clusters in the two dialects. When <u>both</u> members of a word-final two-consonant cluster are voiced, or <u>both</u> unvoiced, the second member is 'dropped' (i.e., absent) by speakers of D1, which is equivalent to stating that the presence of the second consonant in speech is ø. In the TD, on the other hand, it is never dropped, i.e. it is obligatory to retain it. The list of reductions occurring in D1 includes the last member of all the following pairs: [pt ps ts čt kt ks ft fs θt θs sp st sk št bd bz dz ǰd gd gz vd vz ðd ðz rb rd rǰ rg rz rm rn rl zd žd md mz nd nz ŋd ŋz ld lǰ lz lmj. These pairs give rise to contrasts (and therefore conflicts/problems) in items such as the following:

	D1	TD
A.	lef'	left
	des'	desk
	fren'	friend
B.	hat'	hats
	bed'	beds
	home'	homes
C.	slip'	slipped
	stab'	stabbed
	slip'	slips
	stab'	stabs

Words in Group A are monomorphemic, and thus are 'deviant' in D1 only on the <u>lexical</u> level. The consequences of 'dropping' the second member of the two-consonant word-final clusters in Group B and Group C, on the other hand, have morphosyntactic implications, since the omitted sound segment is the overt surface marker in the TD for noun plurality, verb 3rd person singular present tense, or past tense.

Until fairly recently, analyses of dialects in which this type of cluster reduction occurs fallaciously made the assumption that

entire grammatical categories were absent in the dialect on the basis of the absence of their overt surface markers. Not only is it difficult to train speakers of D1 to, in effect, add a final sound to an already familiar word, but in addition, the problem is compounded by the high frequency which clusters in this dialect have. Of the 44 reductions which do occur, 15 involve plural/possessive markers (which are phonologically identical) and another 17 are linked with past tense formation of verbs. As will be reiterated later, there are thus at least three reasons for placing this type of situation at the top of the hierarchy and therefore near the beginning stages of sequencing the teaching materials of the TD: 1) large variety (44 types) of 'deviant' forms; 2) phonological differences affecting morphosyntactic information; and 3) high frequency of occurrence of consonant cluster reduction.

Order 2. D1 Unstressed Initial Vowels. (D1=Ø, TD=.Opt). In cases where multisyllabic words in TD are stressed upon their second syllables, their D1 counterparts omit the first syllable. Hence the occurrence in the latter at times of items such as '(ex)cep(t)', '(sup)pose(d)', '(un)less', '(di)vorce', and '(a)bout'. From their point of view, speakers of D1 contend with having to add new syllables to already-familiar words when operating in TD. Not only do they have to remember to add a syllable, they must also remember which one goes on which word. In this situation illustrating Order 2, the TD choice is an optional one because of the wide list of potential fillers of the first-syllable slot. The slot itself, however, is an obligatory choice in TD, and the existence of this obligatory slot is another

instance of Order 1, discussed above.

Order 3. D1/TD Different Allophonic Distribution. (D1=Opt, TD=Obl).

D1		TD	
[tɔt]	'taught, taut'	[tɔt]	'taught, taut'
[tɔt]	'thought'	[θɔt]	'thought'
[tɪn]	'tin'	[tɪn]	'tin'
[tɪn]	'thin'	[θɪn]	'thin'
[frɛs]	'fresh'	[frɛs]	'fresh'
[frɛs]	'thresh'	[θrɛs]	'thresh'
[fri]	'free'	[fri]	'free'
[fri]	'three'	[θri]	'three'

In D1, [θ] and [t] are in free variation in word-initial position. Thus, unpredictably, two different words will at times sound identical. Likewise, in D1, [θ] and [f] are randomly interchanged. In TD, on the other hand, these sounds are discrete (i.e., belong to different phonemes) and thus cannot be interchanged without changing the meaning of the words in which they occur. In other words, in D1,word-initially, [θ f t] are allophones of a single phoneme, whereas in TD each of these three phones is an allophone of a discrete phoneme.

Order 4. D1 Pre-Nasal Front Vowels. (D1=Obl, TD=Opt).

D1 'Std. Southern'		TD 'Std. Northern'	
[pɪn]	'pin'	[pɪn]	'pin'
[pɪn]	'pen'	[pɛn]	'pen'
[tɪn]	'tin'	[tɪn]	'tin'
[tɪn]	'ten'	[tɛn]	'ten'

In D1, before nasals [ɪ] and [ɪ] represent /i/ and /e/ respectively. This 'neutralization' of vowels before nasals means that for speakers

of D1 there is only one choice, i.e., the choice is obligatory. Speakers of TD, on the other hand, do the same thing before nasals as they do elsewhere, i.e., have [I] representing /i/ and [ɛ] representing /e/. Thus, speakers of TD have an optional choice of two sounds in an environment where speakers of D1 have an obligatory sound. This neutralization of pre-nasal non-low front vowels is by no means limited to speakers of 'Black English'. It prevails throughout much of the South, and is found in areas such as East Texas. Though involving a phonological distinction (or lack of it) this difference usually leads to little lexical misunderstanding when a semantic context is furnished. Examples of Order 4 are relatively rare, and therefore, would receive less time and attention than items of Orders 1-3, both upon the basis of lesser difficulty and also upon the basis of lesser frequency.

Order 5. D1 [243#] Pitch Pattern Extinction. (D1=Obl, TD=Ø). Any phonological (or other-level) feature which is an obligatory choice in D1 but which is entirely absent in the TD is particularly resistant to extinction. In both dialects, a possible response to virtually any question is 'I don't know.' In TD, the appropriate concomitant pitch pattern is the most-frequently-occurring 231# pattern, which is used for statements and all WH- questions. In D1, the 'I don't know' response has in opposition to this 231# pattern a pattern of 243#, which means that D1 speakers will automatically attempt to transfer the latter into TD. Since speakers of D1 also use 231# as their predominant intonation pattern, it might be assumed that this somewhat atypical instance of 243# would be of little

consequence. This is true in the total context of the language, but it must be kept in mind that the response 'I don't know' has a particularly high frequency of occurrence, especially in the classroom environment, and thus its extinction does warrant serious attention. Social judgements based upon prejudices and stereotypes are also involved here. Intonation, being acquired by infants before they are even able able to coordinate the muscles involved in producing vowels and consonants, is the most deeply ingrained feature of the language system, and, being the earliest-acquired language habit, will predictably be the most difficult habit to alter or extinguish.

Order 6. Nasalized Vowel Extinction. (Dl=Opt, TD=Ø). In Dl, nasalized vowels sometimes occur instead of oral vowels when followed by word-final nasal consonants. TD has no nasalized vowels. In Dl, 'some', 'son', and 'sung' may all be realized phonetically as [sʌ̃]. The problem is approached by changing the choice from Optional (To nasalize or not to nasalize?) to Ø (Don't ever do it because in this system, it doesn't ever exist!).

Order 7. Different Syllable-Initial Consonant Clusters. (Dl=Opt, TD=Opt). Since both Dl and TD permit the choice of almost all of the consonants in their individual inventories to occur in syllable-initial position ([ŋ] being the unique exception), and because the consonant inventories of the two dialects in question have practically a one-to-one match, this area constitutes one of a great amount of positive transfer. Fortunately, this is the case, as, otherwise, this area would constitute tremenduous problems.

Order 8. Areas of No Significant Differences. (D1=Obl, TD=Obl). This combination of obligatory matching choices appears at the bottom of the Hierarchy of Difficulty, it being the one involving the maximum possible amount of positive transfer. Any obligatory pattern in one system which matches the same obligatory pattern in another system with no significant observable difference will subconsciously and automatically transfer without speakers of either system even being aware that this area could constitute problems. If D1 and TD were not identical with regard to many features, and similar with respect to many others, they would, in fact, not be dialects of the same language, but rather, different languages. One simple illustration of Order 8 is the fact that both in D1 and TD, syllables beginning with the triconsonantal sequence [spl-] must be followed by either a vowel or a glide, since neither system tolerates four-consonant syllable-initial clusters.

Once all relevant features of D1 and TD have been appropriately ranked and placed into the hierarchy of difficulty, which was illustrated above with merely one single example for each of the eight orders, the theoretical guide for aiding in the sequencing of teaching materials is complete. The task is not completed, however, for this basic hierarchy needs adjustment based upon additional relevant considerations. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin specifically include mention of the factors of functional load, potential mishearing, and pattern congruity.[3]

Functional Load is the relative quantitative amount to which a feature or contrast is put to use within a linguistic system. For

example, [ž] is by far the most infrequent sound segment in English. Thus, even if its production were a problem, it would need to receive a relatively small amount of practice time. Likewise, a difficult sound production would receive little attention unless intelligibility of that item were affected through potential mishearing. In the third place, if a majority of the members of a linguistic subsystem behave systematically as a set, even though individual members of this set might appear at different levels of difficulty within the unadjusted theoretical hierarchy, due to different types and degrees of transfer difficulty, pattern congruity should override so that the entire set is presented together as a unit. If this is not done, valuable generalities about the subsystem and its relation to the overall system can be missed or obscured.

When working across dialect boundaries rather than across language boundaries, an additional factor becomes relevant. Every individual plays different roles each time he uses language. Those linguistic features which are suitable for a given social context or situation might be said to constitute social appropriateness. An initial discussion of which features of D1 and TD are considered socially acceptable in which areas of social behavior should precede the initiation of actual language instruction. Once the instruction is begun, it should constantly be kept clear what roles are being played in what dialect and also why this is the case. This means that learners of TD need to acquire an awareness of the distinctive features of both D1 and TD and to acquire intuitions about the social appropriateness of the roles involved with the target dialect

to parallel the intuitions which they already have about their own native dialect.

As would be anticipated, the techniques of contrastive analysis can be equally powerful and effective on all levels of language other than the brief phonological samples included here. For example, a similar hierarchy can be set up on the syntactic level. On this higher level of language, additional factors become necessary, both in the initial hierarchy itself and in the subsequent adjustments. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin include structural correspondence and functional/semantic correspondence.[4] Both refer to equivalencies in Dl and TD. Structural Correspondence refers to items in the two dialects which belong to the same grammatical categories and which occur in the same linear order. In a functional/semantic correspondence, the equivalent items occur in a different order in each system. The inclusion of these variables has a considerable influence upon the alteration of the hierarchy. In addition, the practical experiences and intuitions of the user of the hierarchy override all other considerations.

By wedding the linguistic techniques briefly highlighted here with the psychological principles of incentive, interest and relevance; practice, revision and integration; learning capacity, understanding and motivation; memorization, association and analogy, the instructor can thus provide the learner with the optimal atmosphere for the unique accomplishment of the successful mastery of the Target Dialect.

NOTES

[1] David L. Shores, ed., Contemporary English (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972).

[2] Robert P. Stockwell and J. Donald Bowen, The Sounds of English and Spanish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Robert P. Stockwell, J. Donald Bowen and John W. Martin, The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).